



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

25 June 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : Viet Cong Military Proselyting and
Penetration Activities

1. This memorandum and its attachment were prepared in response to your 19 May request for an analysis of Viet Cong military proselyting and penetration activities. This memorandum's attachment also constitutes a fuller and broader look at some of the issues on which our preliminary findings were reported in a memorandum entitled Viet Cong Covert Agencies in South Vietnamese Territory (ER IM 70-63, May 1970).

2. The Communists in Vietnam believe (and often state) that they are fighting the war on three fronts: military, political, and proselyting. The degree of emphasis devoted to each sphere of activity depends on the Communists' analysis of the situation at any given time. After the Paris peace talks opened and especially after the U.S. indicated its plans for reducing U.S. troop strength, the Communists began to place more stress on the political and proselyting aspects of their struggle. Part of this effort was directed at improving their civilian and military proselyting activities and infiltrating large numbers of additional agents into GVN areas and institutions for both immediate and long range political tasks.

3. This shift in activity emphasis was probably designed to accomplish three objectives:

a. To put the Communists in the strongest possible position to wage the political-subversive struggle which would follow any cease-fire or negotiated settlement (developments the Communists viewed as distinct possibilities in 1969).

b. To weaken South Vietnam's military, security, and administrative capabilities for a long-term struggle if there should be no settlement.

c. To put the Communists in a position to take maximum advantage of any dramatic or sudden change in the GVN's political position and, especially, to exploit any political stresses or crises that might arise in Saigon.

4. There is little doubt that the Communists' proselyting/ intelligence apparatus is playing an important role in their total effort. Their penetrations of the GVN's military and administrative establishment have given the Communists a capability for providing tactical warning and strategic intelligence, setting up accommodations, promoting desertions, exacerbating political dissension, spreading propaganda, conducting sabotage and hindering Vietnamization. We doubt, however, that under present circumstances enemy penetrations, by themselves, could seriously cripple the GVN political or military structure, or instigate a mass uprising against the government.

5. Nevertheless, a serious and potentially very dangerous situation could develop if the government fails to contend successfully with the numerous exploitable elements of dissent which plague Vietnamese society, such as unrest among the students, minorities, Buddhists and veterans, the rising cost of living and other economic strains, corruption, and divisions within the national political leadership. Should these elements of dissent coalesce, or should there be a serious deterioration in the military situation, the presence of a significant subversive element within the GVN structure could help bring on the kind of political strife and discord which would work to the advantage of the Communists. Continuing and intensified efforts

to eliminate or reduce these basic causes of dissent will be an essential counterpart to the measures for improved security discussed in the attachment to this memorandum.

6. The GVN security and intelligence agencies have achieved some notable successes in counterintelligence operations. With American advice and guidance, there has been a marked improvement over the years in their professionalism and in coordination of their operations. We recognize, however, that further improvements in this sphere will be required if the GVN is to cope with the growing VC subversive effort, especially if the conflict should move primarily into the political arena. The intelligence community is presently focusing on this problem through the Interagency Coordinating Group for Vietnamization of Intelligence.

7. I have attached hereto a more detailed discussion of the questions raised in your memorandum of 19 May. The Agency also has under preparation a new study of the Viet Cong military proselyting effort and a new examination of the VCI, both of which will be forwarded to you as soon as they are completed.

Richard Helms
Director

Attachment

COMMUNIST SUBVERSIVE EFFORTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

A. Assessment of Communist Subversive Efforts.

1. A major premise underlying any assessment of the extent and significance of increased proselyting and penetration efforts, or the subversive threat as a whole, is that the Communists believe the war will not be brought to conclusion by military action alone. On the basis of the Vietnamese Communists' own statements of policy as contained in captured documents (exhaustively discussed in COSVN Resolution 9 of July 1969 and in subsequent directives), some of the main battles in the future will be fought within the political/diplomatic arena. In Communist terms, proselyting and penetration work, as well as the entire field of covert subversive endeavor, is regarded as an integral part of the political struggle. ("Political struggle" may be viewed as including all forms of the covert struggle engaged in by Communist security and intelligence components, * civilian and military proselyting elements, and other clandestine-oriented elements.)

* Intelligence and security components include the North Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security (MPS), which supervises Communist Party security sections and other elements/agents in South Vietnam; the North Vietnamese Research Agency (Cuc Nghien Cuu) of the Ministry of Defense, which directs the tactical and strategic military intelligence operations in the South of both the Strategic Intelligence Office (SIO) of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), which acts as the executive agent of the Research Agency in supervising certain strategic intelligence operations in the South; and the Military Intelligence Office (MIO), of COSVN, which conducts and supervises military intelligence operations in the South.

2. For years, Vietnamese Communist efforts in the proselyting area (aimed at both GVN civilian and military targets), and in the security, intelligence, and political action fields in South Vietnam have been comprehensive and massive. They have been targeted against all facets of private and public life. Communist documents suggest that the Communists have had contact of one kind or another with hundreds of thousands of GVN soldiers and civilian officials each year. From the mid-60s until early 1969, the Communist organization in South Vietnam gave primary emphasis to the military aspects of the revolutionary struggle. While efforts had been made to improve their political posture in the South, the Communists prior to 1969 devoted somewhat less attention, personnel, and effort to the political aspects of their struggle.

3. Beginning with the Paris Peace Talks in mid-1968 and especially after the first hints of unilateral reductions in United States troop strengths in South Vietnam in 1969, the Communists began to put greater stress on both the long and short-range preparations for political struggle. Communist directives contain unmistakable pronouncements of policy and directions concerning this increased emphasis on the political struggle. Great importance was placed on the need for more effective results in the fields of civilian and military proselyting and on the importance of the security apparatus, not only with respect to its South Vietnamese targets, but with respect to the security of party organizations themselves. A special effort was made to infiltrate large numbers of additional agents into GVN-controlled areas for both immediate and long-range political tasks. Measures were taken to transfer guerrillas into the Viet Cong party/government organizations for employment in activities more directly related to and in support of the political struggle. The best documented method for infiltrating agents into GVN territory has been by false defection through the Chieu Hoi program. The number of false defectors last year appears to have increased substantially and may have reached several thousands.

4. In June 1969, the Viet Cong launched an "Accelerated Military Proselyting Campaign." The campaign was part of the Communist strategy, formulated earlier in the year, designed to lower the Communists' military profile while U.S. troop

withdrawals proceeded. The military proselyting campaign has the short-term objective of weakening the GVN forces and thus undermining the Vietnamization program and the long-term goal of building a reserve of subversive agents. This reserve could be used in a number of contingencies: a cease-fire, a political upheaval such as a coup, or simply as an adjunct to the Communists' military and political effort over the longer term.

5. Recently captured documents reveal that the intelligence/security elements in the South are extensively manned and the Communists are planning to increase their numbers. A December 1969 document contained strength figures for both the strategic (SIO) and tactical military (MIO) headquarters elements in COSVN; SIO was listed as having 1,040 personnel and MIO, 1,401. In another document covering fund estimates for COSVN agencies (prepared in late 1969), the COSVN Public Security Section (i. e., headquarters administrative element) was designated as having 284 members but with an estimated increase by 1970 to 500 personnel; the Armed Security Section, listed as having 1,294 members at the end of September 1969, was projected for 3,000 members by the end of 1970. Also in the same document was an indicated increase of personnel assigned to the COSVN Military Proselyting Section from 185 members in 1969 to 300 members in 1970. Other documents indicate the full-time military proselyting apparatus is also undergoing considerable expansion at the lower echelons.

6. In addition to the full-time bureaucracy, the proselyting effort employs part-time workers. These do the grass-roots proselyting work in the cities, villages, and hamlets. They include couriers, agent spotters, women who write letters or plead with ARVN soldiers to desert, and persons who distribute pamphlets or write slogans on walls. Countrywide, they number in the tens of thousands.

7. The number of penetrations in the South Vietnamese Armed Forces and security agencies as a result of military proselyting cannot be estimated with confidence because of the limited data available. Actual achievement may be quite high given the concentrated VC effort in this field, their experience in conducting such operations, and their demonstrated past successes. These penetrations range from trained and dedicated agents to unproductive fence-sitters. The hard core of the agent network -- Party or Party Youth Group members -- may have

* totaled about 2,500 as of early 1969. The entire network may have been on the order of 20,000. We believe that both the quality and number have increased somewhat since then.

8. In listing agents on their rosters, Communist military proselytors usually try to make quality distinctions. The most trustworthy agents are listed as "Fifth Columnists"; those of less certain reliability are designated as "Sympathizers." Captured rosters from a limited number of areas suggest that the number of Fifth Columnists and Sympathizers for all areas of South Vietnam are roughly equal. Considerably less than one quarter of the total of suspected military proselyting agents in early 1969 were believed to be functioning as GVN civilian and security officials. All but a few of the balance belonged to ARVN or to the Regional and Popular Forces. Perhaps a tenth of these were officers.

B. The Impact of Proselyting/Penetration Activities on Vietnamization

9. It is difficult to measure the total impact of the Communist proselyting and penetration effort because by definition these operations are covert and they are only really successful when we are not aware of them. Moreover, the Communists often exaggerate their successes and the GVN tries to hide them.

10. It is self-evident that the stepped up Communist proselyting efforts during the past year or so have not prevented the Vietnamization program from making progress. Indeed, the growth of South Vietnam's armed forces, the shrinkage of the Viet Cong population base, and a more effective GVN security apparatus have created new problems for enemy proselytors. The atmosphere in which they have been working, at least until recent months, clearly has not been conducive to success.

11. There is, however, solid evidence that penetrations of the GVN and of GVN forces have often aided Communist attacks, and such penetrations probably contribute regularly to successful acts of sabotage and assassination, to encouraging South Vietnamese desertions, and to enabling individual Communists and Communist units to evade South Vietnamese operations. To the

extent that such activities inhibit South Vietnam from assuming more responsibility for the conduct of the war, the enemy proselyting/subversive effort is setting back progress of the Vietnamization program.

12. But the main purposes of this effort probably are not short-range and not primarily designed to frustrate or disrupt the Vietnamization program as such. For more than a year, the Communists have been tailoring their activities to the long haul struggle in South Vietnam, partly on the assumption that their prospects are bound to improve as more and more U.S. forces are withdrawn. The Communists probably calculate that as the Vietnamization program proceeds, the GVN will be increasingly hard pressed, if not overwhelmed, by a combination of political, economic, and military/subversive pressures, and that such an environment will facilitate their proselyting tasks and enable them to bring more of their in-place subversive assets into play. None of our evidence suggests that the Communists expect to gain the upper hand soon or easily, but the presence of a significant subversive apparatus within the GVN structure could help them greatly both in fomenting future chaos, and in exploiting an unstable situation to their advantage.

C. Nature and Effectiveness of Current GVN Countermeasures

13. The GVN elements which attempt to cope with Communist subversive activity within the army and security apparatus are the ARVN Military Security Service (MSS), and the National Police, particularly its Special Branch. The organizations which try to counter subversion aimed at the population at large are the National Police, the GVN military forces (including ARVN, and the Regional and Popular Forces), and the Peoples' Self Defense Force (PSDF).

14. Starting in early 1968, the MSS began to implement an intensified program to combat subversion in the armed forces. The program included increasing numbers of investigations, greater file security, lectures to GVN soldiers by captured Viet Cong cadres, requirements that the soldiers sign pledges that they were not in contact with the enemy, and appeals to

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military personnel to report VC approaches to their superiors. In a fifteen-month period from January 1968 to March 1969, the MSS and related security organs within ARVN arrested 1,186 military personnel on charges of being Communist agents (although many were not convicted). In the last year or so, the Police Special Branch has rolled up several Viet Cong networks in Saigon. Communist elements arrested have included sappers, security cadres, and intelligence operatives. A summary of some of these activities was forwarded to Dr. Kissinger by the Deputy Director for Plans on 15 May 1970.

15. Other programs tied in with the counter-subversive efforts -- either directly or indirectly -- include the Chieu Hoi program and the Phoenix program. In addition, the GVN last year created the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (NICC). The NICC attempts to coordinate the individual efforts of the heretofore independent-minded police and security services in the fields of counterintelligence.

16. The agencies are employing most standard counter-intelligence techniques. For example, ex-Communist cadres are used to spot Viet Cong operatives trying to infiltrate the cities. Successful examples of this technique have occurred in Saigon, Danang and Kien Hoa.

17. In brief, the GVN machinery for counter-subversion exists, and GVN agencies are aware of the mechanics of how to make it run. These efforts are being supported by extensive U.S. advisory and material assistance.

18. The effectiveness of GVN countermeasures is another story. Several basic unsolved problems still exist. First, the Viet Cong find it relatively simple to acquire the legal papers necessary to enter GVN territory and join government organizations. They can do so by theft, bribery, forgery or false defection through the Chieu Hoi program. Second, the population has been apathetic in reporting approaches by Communist proselytors and intelligence agents. The only set of statistics available on the subject was obtained from the MSS. It indicates that during a sixteen-month period ending June 1969, only 348 GVN soldiers had reported Viet Cong contacts to the authorities. This was apparently only a small fraction of the number of approaches to soldiers and police during the same period. Finally, though progress has been made, a large number of captives are still either not convicted or, in a variety of ways, are able to avoid prison sentences.

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19. The problems of counterintelligence and counter-subversion are similar to those affecting all governmental programs in South Vietnam. These include venality which allows GVN policemen to be bribed by Viet Cong agents, a lack of effective leadership, and the widespread lack of determination to root out the Communists on the part of many administrative and civilian personnel, territorial security forces, and the population in general.

20. Of course, the picture is not entirely one sided. The effectiveness of GVN countermeasures must be assessed as spotty in some respects and effective in others. In their totality, they have probably inflicted significant damage to the enemy's subversive structure. Communist documents, ralliers, and prisoners frequently complain that the GVN security apparatus has made it difficult for agents to operate in many areas. Moreover, the penetrated GVN agencies have remained intact and operating, and it is doubtful that under present circumstances such penetration could seriously cripple them. Additionally, Viet Cong security section documents often express concern about the success of GVN operations in the fields of intelligence, psychological warfare, and Chieu Hoi in penetrating VC security.

21. Overall, however, the difficulties facing GVN counter-intelligence are basic and fundamental. In large part, they hinge on the fact that the human resources assigned to counterintelligence are limited and their effectiveness is impaired by problems of motivation and morale, not only of the police, but of the population at large. Thus, it is more of a matter of people than of measures.

D. Alternative Courses of Action to Improve GVN Capabilities

22. Influence the highest levels of the South Vietnamese government to raise standards of performance for the police system, recognizing demonstrated performance over seniority, military rank or personal connections. Convert the police service into an adequately paid and enviable career service with pertinent career benefits.

23. Seek agreement by the highest levels of the GVN for a government review of the provincial administrative system, with a view to replacing chiefs and senior administrative

personnel who have proven records of slackness and who lack determination to make provincial administrations more susceptible to centralized control and supervision in place of the largely independent, personal satrap system now in effect.

24. Improve the security screening system applied to refugees and ralliers and their subsequent control by police authorities.

25. Improve the capabilities of the Peoples' Self Defense Forces, and convert them into a reasonably well-paid corps in order to compensate for the personal motivation which is so often lacking. Assumption of this service by an expanded National Police Field Force might be considered.

26. Expand the Military Security Service and intensify efforts to improve its professionalism. One outstanding need is to increase the size and efficiency of its informant nets within the armed forces, particularly in the Regional and Popular Forces.

27. Maintain or increase the current level of U.S. advisory and material support to the GVN police and other security and intelligence agencies. Maintain or increase the degree of continuity on the U.S. side in this form of support for at least three or four years. Concurrently, obtain the highest level GVN support for maintenance in concerned GVN agencies of the continuity of key personnel of demonstrated competence.

28. Continue the Agency's program to upgrade the GVN's communications intelligence capability, particularly in coverage of subversive activities.

29. Develop programs to encourage the reporting of the presence and approaches of Viet Cong agitators and agents.

30. Revamp and revitalize the GVN information apparatus.